

OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRIMEVAL ARCHÆOLOGY OF
DORSETSHIRE.BY CHARLES WARNE.

I HOPE to be enabled to prove, from the facts to which I am desirous of drawing attention, that few counties are richer in primeval archæology than Dorsetshire; a circumstance in a great measure to be attributed to its local position. The possession of a considerable line of coast, well-sheltered roadsteads, and secure harbours of easy access, in addition to its proximity to the continent, presented such facilities to the aboriginal settlers as led them to avail themselves of these advantages to a considerable extent.

The evidences and manifestations of the primitive fathers of our land meet the eye of the antiquary at every point and in every form. Many a mound rises around him covered with the green sward and rustling grass;—these were their tombs; and when seen in graceful and varied form, whether in immediate contiguity, or breaking the outline of the hills in the distant horizon, they cannot fail to arrest the attention of even the careless spectator, whilst the more reflective is led by his imagination to wander, in the mind's eye, through the long vista of past centuries, and meditate on the manners and customs, religious systems and ceremonies, which were hallowed in their observances by those venerable patriarchs who—

“O'er their graves in heapy hillocks threw
The crumbling mould.”—*Apollonius Rhodius*.

On our yet uninclosed downs, occasional and marked inequalities of the surface,—attracting notice in some instances from their circular depressions, in others from a series of slight fossæ and low valla of remarkable irregularity, frequently with track and covered ways in connexion,—point out the simple settlements and rude residences of our Celtic predecessors. Whilst the stupendous monolith, mystic circle, and massy cromlech, are so many sure but silent memorials of a religious system with its accompanying ceremonies, over which a veil of impenetrable obscurity seems destined ever to remain.

It will be impossible in this place (and in a paper so limited as this must necessarily be) to enter into a detailed description of these illustrations of ancient Dorsetshire; I must therefore content myself on the present occasion with giving a brief review of such of these remains as have come under my personal observation. In doing this, though I cannot forbear expressing my regret that it has not fallen into abler hands, still it is highly necessary that some record should be made (meagre even as it may be) of these (what we had vainly conceived) time-enduring monuments; but the great change which the surface of the land has of late undergone, has caused them to disappear before us in such rapid succession,—some being totally obliterated, and others so sadly mutilated, as to call forth the severest censures of every one who has any sympathy with the long past: indeed, so extensive of late has been the progress of cultivation, to such a length it has and is still being carried, that I am warranted on the best information in asserting, that in the county of Dorset alone, not less than from eight to ten thousand acres of our down land have within these last five years been converted into tillage.

“Year following year steals something ev’ry day.”

But the effect of these wholesale operations, and the destructive agency of the plough, are known to every one who has paid any practical attention to primeval archæology; and we may without any stretch of imagination fairly assume, that the period will arrive, indeed is not far distant, when the inquirer after the traces of the fathers of our land, will have to content himself with such brief notices as are recorded in the pages of the historian and local antiquary: for to the all-engrossing utilitarianism of the nineteenth century, attaches the peculiar demerit of eradicating from the fair face of the soil, and desecrating more of these time-hallowed reliques, than had previously been done during so many centuries,—relics whose retrospective and instructive associations it had been fondly hoped would have secured for them respect, and preserved them from such profanations.

That the solitude of our island was first broken in upon, and the first rude settlers landed, on our southern shores, seems pretty conclusive; and that Dorsetshire in particular was thus early

peopled, is, if we may reason from analogy, self-apparent, since the whole face of the open portions of the county has numerous vestiges of the Celtic race impressed on it; in the low parts they have left but few, in fact we may say (by comparison), no traces behind them: this is easily accounted for, if we take into consideration the obstacles which the physical features of the country presented at this early period—the low lands being covered with forest and morass. My brief notices of our Celtic remains will necessarily be confined to the hill, or rather down, portions of the county.

It is unnecessary in a paper such as the present, to enter into a retrospect of the condition of mankind, at the early peopling of this island; still we cannot sufficiently admire the wisdom of a beneficent Providence in the adaptation of its creatures: thus the necessities of the primitive man were few, such as his limited knowledge could easily supply, and we accordingly find him occupied in the hunter and pastoral states. Restricted as were his wants, and with a mind but little in advance, we must not expect to find the remains of this early period otherwise than rude and simple, of which no better proof can be given than in their locations or dwellings, which will come first under consideration; of these (and which carry on them* evidences of the greatest antiquity), some remarkable examples are to be found in different parts of the county. The first to which I shall direct attention, are on a down called Bondsleigh, (in the parish of Shillingstone), on the lofty ridge known by the name of Bulbarrow, which overlooks the extensive Vale of Blakemore.

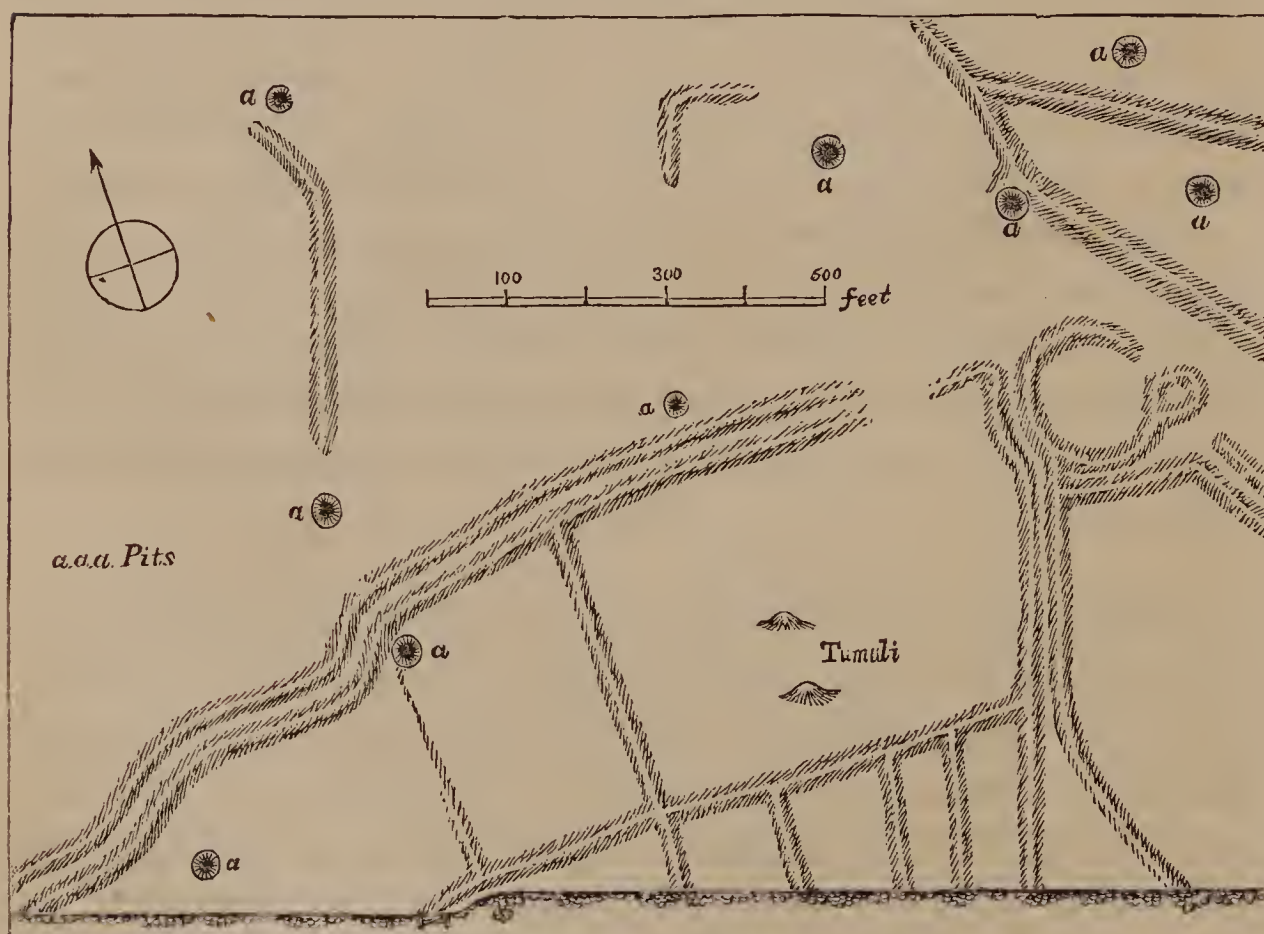
* Bondsleigh pits examined July 23rd, 1846.—An examination of these pits was made a few days since by Messrs. Sydenham, Hall, and myself; the result of our researches was satisfactory, in as much as it afforded a conclusive testimony of the purposes to which we had previously assigned them; as we found at the bottom (of the pits), and at a depth varying from 18 inches to 2 feet beneath the surface, charcoal intermixed with ashes, lying on a compact pitching of flints. The pits were more numerous than we had anticipated, being scattered over the whole

ridge, a tract of from four to five (or more) miles in extent. In their size they vary, some being from forty to fifty feet in diameter at the top, and from eight to ten feet deep, others less, a few were double, and some had the earth which had been removed in their formation, placed in a ridge on one side on the brink, and in every instance on the side which was most exposed to the weather. A friend who resides in the neighbourhood mentioned, in confirmation of their use, that the shepherd boys occasionally found fragments of rude pottery with charcoal, in some of these pits.

This down is at the present day apparently in the same state of original waste as it was at the period of its first occupancy by the tribes who there “lived, and moved, and had their being”: here are to be seen a series of circular pits, in form similar to an inverted cone, evidently adapted for sheltering from the cold blast an uncivilized race, whose sole requirements, in addition to their humble dwellings, were the providing themselves with the spoils of the chase as a subsistence.

Similar pits or hollows are to be found on the uninclosed down of Stratton, where they are numerous, have some tumuli interspersed, and appear to be approached by some ancient viæ, but which we may consider to be of a period posterior to the pits. Similar hollows are also on a down in the parish of Winfrith. Others on that of Bere Regis.

The next examples of their dwellings we find to be more elaborate in their nature and design, shewing an advance in civilization. Of these a fine specimen is to be seen on Turnworth down, on the same ridge of Bulbarrow, consisting, in addition to



British Settlement on Turnwood Common.

several of these pits, of a via running to and around a large irregular circular enclosure, about 160 ft. at its greatest diameter: this is formed by a slightly raised agger with its fosse on the

outside; the entrance, which is on the east, is protected by a small outwork; the via at this point branches off in different directions, as shewn in the plan. The adjacent ground seems to have been divided into unequal portions by a series of low rectangular banks, or rather walls, as they are all formed of flints. Somewhat similar earthworks, at least possessing in some of its features like characteristics, are to be found on Cerne hill, immediately above the singular turf-incised figure called the Giant. Here also viæ of approach and exit are to be traced. Sites of British settlements may be discovered on the respective downs of Tarrant Hinton, Tarrant Gunville, and Launceston, all in the neighbourhood of Blandford. At the north-eastern extremity of the county, bordering on Wiltshire, on the down called Boveridge Heath, about midway between Cranborne and Pentridge, are a series of these circular depressions and irregular elevations of the soil, which denote its early appropriation. Some four or five years since, on throwing a ditch across this site, the workmen turned up much extraneous matter, such as bones, fragments of coarse pottery, etc., mingled with the soil, which was in some parts of a dark loamy nature.

In the same vicinity, on the down, near Oakly Wood, are similar indications, and in fact the whole neighbourhood seems to have teemed with an extensive early population; the numerous tumuli around are an attestation which will receive greater confirmation, if we may be allowed to suppose that the land in many places hereabouts has been used for agricultural purposes at a contemporary period, being divided by low rectangular earthworks, or banks, into portions or enclosures. Cæsar's testimony is by no means conclusive against this appropriation; his words are: "The greater part of those within the country never sow their lands." It is enough to prove that although not universally, it was occasionally practised, in all likelihood by distinct clans; thus, whilst some were occupied by hunting and nomadic pursuits, others were engaged (limited it may be) in cultivating the soil.

On the singular isolated hill of Chalbury, in the parish of Sutton Poyntz, the settlement is extensive, combining with it that of a place of considerable strength, or as has been elsewhere observed, a hill fortress, being defended with a single, or in some parts, double row of ramparts; the vestigia differ in like

manner from the preceding examples, wanting the deep-circular pit or slight vallum, and consists of a great number of slight depressions. Hod Hill, in the parish of Stourpaine, possesses many features in common with Chalbury, but on a more extended scale; many of the pits and depressions within its area have been closely examined, and found to contain a fine black unctuous mould, with portions of charcoal, and fragments of coarse pottery intermixed.

The last example I shall deem it necessary to mention, is one of the most interesting of the whole series; one, it is deeply to be deplored, which has suffered more from the encroaching obliterations of cultivation, the destructive influences of modern innovation, than any of the others. I refer to the grand settlement of Vindogladia, on the downs, midway between Blandford and Salisbury.

The first intimation of this remarkable place is observable on the high-road from Blandford to Salisbury, between the seventh and eighth mile-stones from the former town, where a *via*—or covered way—is seen trending across the downs in a north-easterly direction. It commences with double valla, but does not proceed far before they are increased to three or four. This trackway continues about a mile, when it enters the grand station at the north-west end; previously to which, and prior to its termination, it makes a slight irregular curve. A junction is made here by another *via* approaching from the west or north-west. This is of much greater strength and irregularity than the preceding, and is formed by three or four lines of valla. On entering the station at this point, we find it occupying the side of a down, which rises with a gentle acclivity from the north-east, and extends over a space of from three-quarters to a mile in length. It is protected on the south-east by a vallation, in some parts with a single, others a triple row of ditches. The form it takes is capricious; indeed, this appears to be a distinctive feature in all the works of this early period. At the north-east side there is no such protection; a marked difference easily accounted for, if we take into consideration from whence the greatest danger was to be apprehended, which was certainly not from the interior—that being peopled by their own kindred tribes. It was from the south they were threatened, and from the south they receded before the hostile aggressions of the colonizing

Belgæ, against whom they found it necessary to throw up defensive barriers.

The whole interior of this settlement is crowded with a series of depressions, inequalities, and slightly-raised banks, taking various forms, and marked on the face of the soil; all attesting the extensive occupancy of this spot by the primal Britons. At nearly the middle part of this settlement, is a large irregular circle, with an entrance from the east. Sir Richard Colt Hoare—who examined this neighbourhood carefully—was led to suppose that it had been devoted to civil and religious uses, from the fact of the fosse being within the agger, a circumstance quite unusual in works of a military character.

The plough, in making its needful, but to the antiquary deplorable, ravages on the whole of these interesting remains, has exposed to view evidences of its early inhabitants, the corroboratives being quantities of coarse fragmental pottery, animal bones, and other vestiges.

An avenue appears to have issued from about the centre of these extensive works, and may be viewed taking a north-easterly direction across the open downs towards a British settlement on the Pentridge hills not far distant. It is formed by two low banks of earth, which are about one hundred yards apart, running parallel to each other, and may be traced for two or three miles. Sir Richard Colt Hoare was of opinion that it had been used as an hippodrome, resembling much that at Stonehenge. If this was its use, no course could have been better selected for giving the spectators, assembled at the station, a clear and uninterrupted view of the contest. As an authority, Sir Richard Colt Hoare is entitled to the most profound respect, but still this opinion seems very questionable, though it differs much from any of the viæ we have described. Vindogladia, independent of its British remains, possesses others of deep interest to the antiquary. As it is, he may here recognize one of the lost stations of Antonine and Richard of Cirencester's Itineraries (*Iter.* xv. and xvi.) I believe the merit of this discovery belongs to Sir Richard Colt Hoare, since which the whole site has gone by its restored name.

The via Iceniana, in all its pristine glory (and truly beautiful is the sight) may be here seen for miles pursuing its undeviating course across the open downs, and passes within three-quarters of a mile of the British settlement. The intermediate space seems to have been the Roman station, and here the ground is

positively strewn with fragmental pottery, so that, in fact, I am not exceeding the limits of veracity in saying, that in some spots it may be literally shovelled up.

The remains which next in priority of construction claim our attention—which impart as much pleasure to the way-side traveller by their picturesque effect on the scenery, as they do subjects of agreeable and instructive reflection to the antiquary from their historic associations—are the tumuli, of which Dorsetshire may justly be proud; for of these silent yet impressive monuments of primeval mortality, I may, without fear of contradiction assert, that few counties contain such a numerous series—certainly, none finer examples.

They occupy, as I before stated, the open portions of the county, commencing on the south-west, midway between Bridport and Dorchester, in the neighbourhood of Longbredy Hut, on the Downs, within three or four miles of which many fine and beautiful examples are to be seen. “For sight of barrows not to be equalled in the world,” were the words of the venerable Stukeley, when making his *Iter* across these same Downs now some hundred and twenty-three years past; and an expression (which every one who may examine the locality will readily admit) made without exaggeration.

A lofty chain of hills, or ridge-way, running parallel with the coast, extends from hence to the Isle of Purbeck, beyond Corf Castle, where, on a hill called Number (or nine barrow) Down, not less than sixteen are to be seen in close connexion. The extent of the points alluded to, occupy a distance of not less than twenty-five miles, the intermediate space being studded with these antique mounds and other primeval objects, which may hereafter be noticed.

This extensive ridge or track-way, in some parts abuts on the coast, whilst at other points a distance of from three to four miles intervenes. In this intermediate space not a tumulus is to be found—a strong and conclusive proof that elevated situations, where attainable, were preferred. They more particularly claim attention (from their numbers) on the several downs of Chaldon, Mayne, Sutton, Came, Bincombe, Winterborne St. Martin, Winterborne, and Kingston Russell.

From this chain of hills they are to be traced in a north-easterly direction through the whole length of the county into

Wilts; covering an extent of country, in some parts, of not less than from twenty-five to thirty miles in width.

Their boundary on the western side may be taken as commencing a little to the west of Longbredy Hut, the point first referred to; they run to Agger-Dun Hill, Cattistock, the Sydling, and Cerne Hills, to Melcombe Horsey and the lofty ridge of Bullbarrow to its termination; and, on crossing the Stour (a river still retaining its primitive name) we find them again on Iwerne and Stourpaine Downs, to Ashmore and the limits of the county. On the eastern part of the county, they may be found commencing at Nine Barrow Down, thence by Studland-Heath, to Wareham, Bere Regis, and Bloxworth, to near Wimborne Minster; thence bounded by the small river Allen (which rises some few miles to the north-east) to Knowlton, St. Giles', and Cranborne, into Wilts. A few may be found without this line, as at Dudbury, etc.

In the intermediate space, between these eastern and western boundaries, they are to be seen in great numbers around Dorchester, as well as at Stratton, Forston, Waterson, Cheselbourne, Dewlish, and Milbourne; at Charlton, and at Bradbury near Wimborne, the neighbourhood of and above Blandford, namely—Tarrant Hinton, Launceston, Gunville, Thickthorn, the Gussages, to Woodyates—where we cross the noble boundary-line of the respective counties of Dorset and Wilts—Bockerly Ditch.

In a county so rich in these memorials of the dead, a great variety will be reasonably expected to be found; and this is so far the case, that the student in this peculiar branch of Archæology, will nowhere meet with a more extensive or instructive study. These remains include examples of every variety as classified by Sir Richard Colt Hoare, whose generalization (I believe) had reference more to the *external* form and feature, than to any *especial* peculiarity of the contents.

For the guidance of the stranger archæologist, I shall refer to the sites of a few of the most interesting varieties.

The lofty "Cone" or finely formed "Bowl" barrows, may rivet our attention by their commanding size, and, whether scattered over our plains, or crowning the hill-tops, are objects of an important and interesting character: but the beautiful, yet unpretending, — the peculiar yet elegant-shaped Druid barrow, is

confessedly the most attractive of the whole series. Dr. Stukeley seems to have been the first to have given, without any analogous reference, this gracefully-formed species of sepulchral mounds the strange misnomer.

The Druid barrow consists of an outward circular vallum of slight elevation, from fifteen to sixty feet in diameter, enclosing a tumulus (in some instances two tumuli are found) in the centre of the area, invariably of small size, frequently not more than four feet in height and eight feet in width.

It was an opinion of Sir Richard Colt Hoare, that they were devoted to female sepulture; why, I am at a loss to conceive,—unless it was that from the elegance of their construction, he imagined them as symbolical (lasting, it must be allowed, still as all legitimate impressions of the fair sex should be) of the superior beauty of the dark-haired Celtic maid. We cannot allow this (beauty) to be attributable so much to race as climate,—for, great as the attractions of the primeval female doubtless were, yet I may, without fear of contradiction, assert that they could not have been in any way superior to—nay, in all probability came not up to—the fascinating witcheries, heightened by the mental intelligence, of the fair and blue-eyed Saxon lass of our own time.

But to return from this—I hope pardonable—digression, I have, from my own experience, found nothing to warrant this peculiar appropriation.

Two tumuli of this class, on the downs of Bincombe, were opened by me a few years since; the diameter of the circle of the first was about fifty feet, enclosing in its area a mound four feet in height. On removing the soil, an admixture of fragments of coarse pottery and bones were found; and, about three feet from the surface, a flat stone, covering a rude urn formed of the coarsest material, partly filled with calcined bones, with three or four thin flat stones, evidently placed for the purpose of retaining the contents, the urn being deposited in an inverted position.

The other tumulus was of the same elevation as the preceding, the diameter of its outer circle measuring sixty feet. In this nothing entire was found, the contents being fragmental pottery and burnt bones.

The finest examples of these (Druid) barrows, are to be seen on the down, about a mile to the south-west of Woodyates

Inn—and close abutting on the great south-western road—which here runs for nearly a mile on the *Via Iceniana*, which may hereabouts be seen in most perfect condition, stretching in a straight line across the open downs, and serves conclusively to establish the priority of construction of the tumuli, one of these being cut through in the formation of the *Via*.

Other examples are to be found on the neighbouring downs; again, on the down of Bloxworth; the respective downs of Came, Bincombe, Upway, Martin's Town, and Winterborne.

The “long” barrow, which I shall next notice, has been of the whole sepulchral series the least explored, its colossal size presenting obstacles of a comparatively insuperable character.

This variety of tumulus is the most stupendous we have, often ranging from forty to eighty yards in length, and from ten to twelve feet in height. The examples on the coast are but few; the respective downs of Winterborne, Bincombe, and Mayne, have each a single specimen; and no other traces of them are to be found till we arrive in the neighbourhood of Bere Regis, where we observe one on the down. To the north of Blandford they may be seen in greater numbers, and will be found on the several downs of Tarrant Hinton and Gunville—two of considerable length on the Chettle estate—with several on the downs of the Gussages, adjoining *Vindogladia*.

One peculiar feature connected with the “long” barrow is, that whilst comparatively numerous in the interior of the county, they are as rarely seen on the coast; and I beg to draw attention to this fact, confessing myself at a loss for a satisfactory elucidation.

Having given the sites of the two most interesting varieties of our ancient tombs, it would be useless to give similar notices of those of a more common character. I shall content myself with observing, that they are to be found within the limits, and in the different localities previously specified.

In the absence of all historic record, we may be allowed to infer, that although the Belgæ were in all probability farther advanced in civilization than the primitive Celtæ of this island, still that their aggression was met by a determined resistance; and, indeed, it seems tolerably conclusive, that a long lapse of years intervened before they were enabled to establish a permanent footing.

Their first irruption is generally considered to have taken place about four hundred years before the Christian era; and we find, from the testimony of Cæsar at the time of his invasion—some three hundred and fifty years subsequent—that the interior of Britain was inhabited by the earliest people, but the coast by the Belgic tribes, who settled in possessions gained by the sword or otherwise.

During this long interval, an occasional intercourse must have naturally taken place between our aboriginal ancestors and their Belgic invaders; and, as we have already assumed the latter to have made farther advance in the social scale, the conclusive inference will be, that such improvements as were the result of this early civilization were readily adopted by them. A careful examination and comparison of the contents of our tumuli, go far in support of this hypothesis—those on the coast being evidently the earliest in construction; as we advance farther into the interior an improvement gradually increasing in the material and fabrication of the contents is observable—thus in themselves carrying a silent but impressive evidence, “a speaking to other years,” of these facts.

I feel, from the length to which this paper has extended, that I have trespassed too long on the time of this meeting. My intention was to have included a review of the stone monuments, ancient viæ, and numerous military earth-works of the county. This must be deferred, and may form the subject of a communication at some future time, unless it be (as I sincerely hope) that they receive attention from more competent hands.

STATION OF VINDOGLADIA.

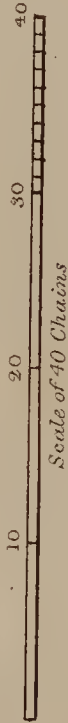
to Durnovaria

Roman Road from Sorbiodunum

The Cursus or Avenue issuing from the Station

Turnpike road from Dorchester to Blandford.

Thorney Down Inn





Roman Road from Sorbiodunum

to Durnovaria

The Cursus or Avenue issuing from the Station

10
20
30
40
Scale of 40 Chains

Thorney Down Inn

Turnpike road from Dorchester to Blandford

STATION OF VINDOCLADIA.

W. Wainwright

